

Healthy Classroom Fact Sheet

Keeping our schools healthy helps provide a better learning environment for students. Many suggestions can be implemented through minor adjustments, but can have a huge pay-off for the school environment. An unhealthy classroom can cause illness requiring absence from school and health symptoms that decrease performance while at school. By keeping the classroom clean and free of health hazards, you can limit the number of problems your students will face.

Following are tips for keeping your classroom cleaner and healthier.

- **Reduce dust mites:** Ask the cleaning staff to vacuum any furniture or draperies thoroughly and if possible, wash them regularly in hot, soapy water to reduce dust mites and other pests.
- **Manage small issues:** Ask bus drivers not to idle next to the fresh air intake, implement an anti-idling policy and ask staff to move garbage away from air intakes. Make sure the staff know of and eliminate any sources of moisture that could encourage mold growth in the classroom.
- **Consider classroom pets:** If classroom pets cause allergic reactions or trigger asthma attacks, either relocate the pet away from sensitive students or consider replacing the animal with a classroom fish or another animal that will not trigger allergy and asthma attacks in any students.
- **Use exhaust fans:** Remove pollutants before they can disperse into the indoor air by ensuring that exhaust fans in classrooms are operating correctly and are not blocked by books, posters or other classroom materials.
- **Ensure adequate ventilation:** Use windows to help circulate air; if the weather is nice and the windows have screens, open them. This simple step can make a big difference. Make sure neither the air conditioner nor the heater is running -- or you'll waste energy. Good classroom ventilation is important. Make sure the ventilation system in the classroom is operating and free of debris.
- **Don't give mold that chance to grow:** Humidity and standing water encourage mold to grow. Schools should work hard to keep surfaces dry. Leaks should be repaired immediately. In humid climates, running an air conditioner also helps.



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- **Keep your school clean:** Do your part to keep your school clean. Be especially careful about food. Keep all surfaces free of food and water, and reduce opportunities for pests to enter the building. Sanitary food habits, like throwing away garbage and sealing food in an airtight container can help prevent problems with pests.
- **Keep dirt out:** Dust allergens are a major cause for respiratory symptoms. Simple steps can reduce the amount of dust and dirt that gets into your school in the first place. For instance, keeping sidewalks and parking areas clean and shoveled will keep shoes clean. Large mats near the entrances can also keep out dirt. Ensure mats are cleaned regularly.
- **Cut the clutter:** Don't let your classroom get messy -- it's very hard to clean a cluttered room properly.
- **Start a class composting project:** Much of what is disposed of into garbage cans each day can be recycled with just a small amount of effort. Composting is the controlled biological decomposition of organic matter, such as food and yard wastes, into humus, a soil-like material. Composting is easy to do and works great in schools because it can give students an opportunity to get involved. Worm composting, also known as vermicomposting, is popular among young students. Worm composting is simply using worm bins to recycle food scraps and other organic materials into humus, a soil conditioner.
- **Keep classroom cleaning products stored and organized:** Classroom closets or cabinets can store a variety of chemicals from cleaning products to art supplies to air fresheners. Remove personal items like candles, hairspray and air fresheners, as well as excess cleaning chemicals from classroom storage areas. Store all chemicals in a locked area away from students to prevent problems.
- **Avoid items that have perfumes or strong odors:** Avoid dry-erase board markers and cleaners, spray adhesives and use of room deodorizing sprays or plug-ins. Use non-toxic water-based materials when ever possible. Many of these items contain volatile organic compounds (VOCs). These compounds pass off as vapor at normal room temperatures. Exposure to VOC's may trigger asthma, allergies and other respiratory symptoms.

For more ideas on how to keep your classroom healthy and problem free, refer to your Green Steps Guide Book in the Green Steps Tool Kit.